

## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 8, 2013

Admiral Robert J. Papp Jr.  
Commandant  
United States Coast Guard  
2100 Second St. SW  
Washington, DC 20593

Mr. Marvin E. Odum  
President  
Shell Oil Company  
P.O. Box 2463  
Houston, TX 77252

Dear Admiral Papp and Mr. Odum:

I have closely monitored reports over the past few weeks involving the failed tow of the drilling rig *Kulluk* from Dutch Harbor to Seattle and its subsequent grounding on Sitkalidak Island near Kodiak. I appreciate the frequent updates on the situation from each of your organizations and, like many Alaskans, I was pleased to learn the *Kulluk* was successfully refloated and moved to a safe harbor on January 7 without the apparent loss of any oil into the environment.

Alaska and the United States have much to gain from development of America's Arctic. Over the past four years, I have worked closely with both of you to ensure we develop the vast oil and gas resources in the Chukchi and Beaufort seas with the highest standards for safety and environmental protection. Moving ahead with the Arctic drilling program is critical to Alaska's economic future. While this incident notably involves marine transportation and not oil exploration or drilling, we must quickly answer the many questions surrounding the *Kulluk* grounding and improve any regulatory or operational standards as needed to ensure this type of maritime accident does not occur again.

As chair of the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, I intend to hold a hearing at an appropriate date following conclusion of this incident. I feel it is important to examine how this grounding occurred; the adequacy of the towing ships for the job in extreme, but not unexpected, weather; the failure of the tow vessel *Aiviq*'s engines; reports of inadequate spare parts inventory, and the failure of the towing systems which led to the grounding of drill rig.

I also intend to ask the United States Coast Guard about its response to this maritime incident and their recommendations on steps needed strengthen safety of these development activities. I commend the Coast Guard's professionalism and skill in

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responding to the situation, its efforts to help secure the vessel before it went aground, the safe evacuation of the drilling rig, and prompt formation of a Unified Command to guide further response. There are always lessons to be learned from these situations, and I especially welcome the Coast Guard's thoughts about its future needs so it can fulfill its mandated role in guiding maritime development in the Arctic that is safe for crewmembers, the public and the environment.

While the incident is still ongoing as of this writing, I request your reports on the *Kulluk* grounding in advance of this hearing, and your recommendations for future steps to avoid such incidents. My goal is to make sure the federal government and private sector learn from this unfortunate incident so we can safely and responsibly move forward with development in the Arctic. This is important not only for oil and gas development but also for shipping, tourism and other maritime activities in the region.

Thank you for your prompt response to this request upon resolution of this incident. Please continue to keep my office informed of the status of the situation.

Sincerely,



Mark Begich  
United States Senator

Cc: Mr. Pete Slaiby, General Manager, Shell Alaska  
RADM Thomas Ostebo, District 17 Commander, United States Coast Guard